

# **Missionary Care Teams**

**at Park Street Church**

June 2024

*“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.”*  
-- Colossians 1:9-12

## What is a Missionary Care Team?

A Missionary Care Team is the primary support group within Park Street Church for each of our missionaries. Missionary Care Team members become Missions advocates and activists in the church, and it is a great way to mobilize God’s army for Missions. They serve to educate the congregation with a kingdom perspective and share about the nature of their respective missionary’s ministry, host culture, and current events in their country/region.

Park Street Church wants each of its missionaries to have a MCT which is enthusiastic about *knowing* them, *praying* for them, *helping* with their personal needs, and *representing* them and their ministry to the church.

In fact, all these things are the job of the whole church. The existence of an MCT doesn’t let any of the rest of us off the hook! But Park Street Church is big, has many programs, and has a lot of turnover in membership. We need a small group within the body who will be each missionary’s home community. This group is the focus for the church’s practical and spiritual help to the missionary. Members commit to remembering their missionary, and to praying for and encouraging them.

### A Missionary Care Team:

- **Knows** its missionaries.
- **Prays** for its missionaries.
- **Helps** with the personal needs of its missionaries.
- **Connects** its missionaries to the church.

The ideal number for an MCT might be about ten, but successful groups have had both more and less than that. Different groups have had different patterns for how often they get together, what they do together, and how they distribute their work. Each team must work out a schedule that fits their team.

### 1. Know your missionary.

Knowledge requires two-way communication. Your missionary wants to know what you are doing, and what is happening in the church. And you need to know him or her to pray for them. There are many ways to communicate; these are some of the things that may be encouraging to your missionary.

- Write (snail mail, email, text).
- Send (photos, videos, packages).
- Give them a call (Zoom, Face Time, etc.)
- Send birthday, anniversary cards, etc.
- Visit them on the field.
- Ask questions about their work, their host nation, their family, and their needs.
- Respond to their letters, answer their questions, assure them of your prayers, give advice when they ask for it.

## **2. Pray for your missionary**

Most Missionary Care Teams have found it helpful to get together once a month (some do it every other month) for a time of fellowship and concentrated prayer for their missionary. This might happen before or after a service on Sundays or maybe an online video call during the week. Ideally, your missionary will join you online for this meeting but if they cannot, make sure to have updated prayer requests from them or have a daily prayer guide available to use.

If you are meeting at the church, please contact the Missions Office ([missions@parkstreet.org](mailto:missions@parkstreet.org)) for assistance with reserving a room.

## **3. Plan a call with your missionary**

If your missionary is unable to meet you online for your monthly prayer times, make sure to schedule regular (perhaps quarterly) online calls with them. In addition to praying for your missionary, this may also be a good time to share news about the church, about your families, plan visits, share scripture, and generally be an encouragement to them. Before you have these calls, it is good to ask your missionary about their security concerns, which video conferencing platform is best for them (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.), and how freely you are able to talk. It is always important to be aware of the security guidelines on page 7 of this document.

## **4. Help with the personal needs of the missionary**

The needs of each missionary are very different. There may be some of their needs that you can meet from within the resources of the MCT. For others you may need to network in the broader congregation. Here are some of the things that you can be alert for:

- Medical needs while they are on the field.
- Educational arrangements, homeschooling courses for their children.
- Housing or transportation needs while they are in Boston.
- Storage of personal items when they go back to the field.
- Books (Christian, professional, leisure reading, children's books).
- Find out what treats they or their kids miss and send occasional care packages.
- Make sure their college-age kids have somewhere to go for Thanksgiving or Christmas vacation.

Regarding these and other needs, good communication is essential. When you are sure of what is really needed, you can be an advocate for the missionary before the congregation, giving information and seeking out solutions to problems.

#### **4. Connect your missionary to the church**

The Missions Office sees your team as valuable partners in the ongoing support of your missionaries and may seek your assistance in various ways, such as:

- Presenting your missionaries' work to the church at the annual Mission Conference, to the Missions Committee, during church services, or to small groups who are interested.
- Look for opportunities to encourage the congregation to pray for your missionary.
- Keep the Minister of Missions and the Director of Global Outreach informed of how they can help your team. If your missionary shares a need or concern with you, please ask them if you may share it with the Missions Office, to help them stay up to date.
- Sustain your team. Members of the Missionary Care Team will move out of town or no longer be able to serve. Keep your ears and eyes open for new people willing to replace them, so your missionary will continue to have a group who faithfully encourages them.
- Keep your missionary connected to what is going on in the church.

#### **Some Biblical Models for Our Work**

Missionary Care Teams come alongside our missionaries to provide moral, spiritual, and relational support. They are essential for strengthening and developing our church's participation in the Lord's mission. God's mission conducted in God's way will not lack God's supply. Missionary Care Teams are part of his unique way to connect us in Boston with his work around the world.

The New Testament contains many intriguing examples of how believers came alongside the first missionaries in the expansion of the gospel across the ancient world. Barnabas is one such example (Acts 4:36-37). He had 'sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet'. He took Saul to the apostles (Acts 9:27). He was 'a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith' (Acts 11:24). He was sent out from Jerusalem to Antioch to understand first-hand the gospel work there (Acts 11:22). Later he was commissioned by the Holy Spirit with Saul for gospel work (Acts 13:2-3). Barnabas encouraged not only Saul, but also the apostles back in Jerusalem and the new churches sprouting up across the region. He was an excellent example of the costly, yet significant, role of someone who actively supports missionaries in gospel work.

Another inspiring example is the church in Philippi. This congregation had adopted Paul and was active in supporting his missionary work. They were a source of joy to Paul because of their 'partnership in the gospel' (Philippians 1:5). There was an emotional closeness between them. Paul described how "I have you in my heart...(and) how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:7). There was an active two-way prayer connection between Paul and the church (Philippians 1:9-11). They sent Epaphroditus to care relationally for Paul in jail (Philippians 2:25). And there was a practical aspect to their support for Paul (Philippians 4:16). Clearly, this congregation was alert and informed about Paul's needs and fully engaged in this enriching mission partnership for the sake of the gospel.

Missionary Care Teams can reflect these biblical examples of God's mission conducted in God's way and, hopefully, give glory to him for his inexpressible gift of salvation (2 Corinthians 9:15).

## **Communicating With Your Missionary<sup>2</sup>**

Ideally, someone from your MCT should communicate with your missionary every week. A simple WhatsApp message, a short email or a FaceTime call goes a long way to help your missionary feel connected. Obviously, they can't keep up each week with everyone on your team, so take some time to designate one or two people to maintain that regular contact or discuss how your team can share this important part of your ministry.

Your missionary wants to hear about spiritual things from you, but also about your life, changes in the church, and changes in society. Sometimes they are the last to know that a friend has died, or a minister has resigned. Here is a list of things that your missionary may be interested in hearing about:

- your family, job, hobbies, trips, vacations
- what the Lord is teaching you
- what is happening in the church: new staff, new initiatives, budget issues
- people: births, deaths, weddings
- the latest trends, technological gadgets, topics of conversation
- anything your family, fellowship or MCT is interested in
- recipes
- youth activities
- good books
- what Americans are thinking about the news (wars, disasters)

**Photos and Videotapes.** A picture is worth a thousand words! Send photos of your Missionary Care Team meeting, their friends, special services, etc. A video greeting is easily sent and might give them joy, knowing that they are being thought of on their birthday, a holiday or just any time that the Spirit might prompt you!

**Care Packages.** Shower them with care packages! Ask your missionary what they would like. Different treats may be inaccessible in different countries. Some ideas might include: candy, chocolate, mac & cheese, marshmallows, taco mix, salad dressing mixes, clothes for kids, games.

When you take your kids to the mall what do they want? Many missionary kids only have this experience once every few years when their parents come home on furlough. A new toy might brighten their day.

Avoid things that will break or go bad on the way. Cookies will arrive as crumbs, but with some chocolate chips they can make their own!

*Special note:* A large box may be delayed or opened at customs, or "disappear" at the post

office, or they might be charged extra fees just to receive the package. Send a small box and save what doesn't fit for another care package next month! Ask your missionary for advice.

**Personal Visits.** These are the ultimate in communication! Epaphroditus took encouragement and fresh news to Paul and brought back news from Paul to the Philippian church. Think creatively of ways to do the same for your missionary.

Find out who in the church visits your missionary's country on business trips, and commission them to visit and hand-carry a message or package of love and concern.

Go alone, or take your family, on a "vacation with a purpose." Our missionaries live in some of the most historically interesting and spectacularly beautiful places in the world.

Send a few people or a short-term mission team to help the missionary in some aspect of their ministry.

Coordinate trips with your missionary ahead of time. Ask them for advice on timing and arrangements. There may be times of year that they are especially busy. If possible, go as tourists and depend on tourist resources. Don't be a financial drain on your missionary or depend on them to house you or make all your arrangements, and don't expect them to spend all their time entertaining you.

Missionaries often live on a modest budget to fit in with the local economy and lifestyle. Maybe they can't afford to eat in the American hotel that you think is a bargain. Be sensitive to their needs and resources.

### **When Should an MCT Member Share an Issue with the Missions Office?**

When an MCT leader or member becomes aware of a conflict or issue in the life of their missionaries, they should encourage the missionary unit to have direct conversations with the field supervisors or team members before bringing the issue before a missions leader. The following two resources are helpful when dealing with such conflicts – *The Peacemaker* and *Resolving Everyday Conflict* by Ken Sande.

There are times, however, when a Missionary Care Team member should raise an issue beyond their conversation with a missionary. If, for example, a member of the missionary unit seems to be experiencing extreme culture shock or other struggle that surfaces in the form of depression, anxiety, chronic complaining about their circumstances or struggling to leave home, for example, that is a sign that the issue needs to be brought to the attention of the Minister of Missions. The MCT member should encourage the missionary to speak directly with the Minister of Missions or ask them for permission to speak with him directly. Missions leaders may discern that the field or sending organization's leadership should be notified and so should be brought into the conversation as soon as possible.

**Security.**<sup>3</sup> It is encouraging for any missionary to get personal mail, emails or any communication from home. Often it is a highlight of their day. However, extra caution must be taken when writing to a missionary in a 'closed' country. Please write as if your letter or message will be read by government officials who do not desire Christian workers in their country!

Find out from your missionary ahead of time what their concerns are. Some countries are more “closed” than others. Some missionaries may live in a country where there is freedom of religion but work across a border where the government opposes the gospel.

Someone working in a closed country must be concerned first that he doesn’t endanger his national co-workers who believe, and then for the safety of his family and organization. If the missionary is in trouble with the government, he will typically be kicked out of the country. National believers may be thrown in jail, or even executed for their faith.

**Please follow this advice unless your missionary tells you differently:**

*a) Do not send:*

- stationery with church, missions, or Christian letterhead
- prayer letters
- church letters or bulletins
- religious stickers or bookmarks

*b) Avoid such words as*

- missions, missionary
- ministry
- convert, conversion
- religion
- Muslim, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism
- church
- Jesus Christ
- salvation
- evangelize, evangelism, outreach
- believers
- politics
- don’t mention the names of national believers
- don’t talk about the work of others in closed countries

*c) Substitutions to use:*

- God = Father
- Jesus = JC
- church = meeting, club
- ministry = work
- salvation = found the way, joined us, came home
- evangelize = share
- missionary = colleague, friend, worker
- Bible = the book, good book
- pray = think of, remember, lift up

## References

Much of the material in this book is inspired by, adapted from, or directly quoted from these sources:

1. Grace Chapel. **Graceful Senders: A Training Guide for Missionary Sending Teams at Grace Chapel.** (Lexington, MA: Grace Chapel).
2. Pirolo, Neal. **Serving as Senders.** (San Diego, CA: Emmaus Road International). 1991.
3. International Missions Incorporated (IMI). **Suggestions for Writing to your Missionary** (brochure).

## Recommended Reading

- **Serving as Senders** by Neal Pirolo
- **Holding the Rope** by Ryan Martin
- **Worlds Apart** by Marilyn Gardner
- **Between Worlds** by Marilyn Gardner

## Training Resources

**Missionary Family Care Training** - [tcktraining.com/churches](http://tcktraining.com/churches)

## Additional Resources:

- **Facing Danger: A Guide Through Risk** by Ann Hampton.
- **Michele Phoenix MK Ministry** – videos, articles, books about caring for MKs.  
[michelephoenix.com/mk-ministry/](http://michelephoenix.com/mk-ministry/)
- **Five Cs that Define MKs by Michele Phoenix** -  
[youtube.com/watch?v=24nKthgWOoA&index=4&list=PLov5koHo\\_G\\_YqqMeFCE9rXKiiPYDEKLE-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24nKthgWOoA&index=4&list=PLov5koHo_G_YqqMeFCE9rXKiiPYDEKLE-)
- **Barnabas International**  
[barnabas.org/member-care/events/asia-member-care-network](http://barnabas.org/member-care/events/asia-member-care-network)
- **Member Care Downloads – Barnabas International**  
[barnabas.org/resources/member-care-downloads](http://barnabas.org/resources/member-care-downloads)
- **Missionary Care: Missions and Mental Health Resources**  
[missionarycare.com](http://missionarycare.com)



## **Suggested Prayer Points for Our Missionaries:**

### **1. Their Relationship with God**

- *For their quiet times - that they would have discipline and joy in reading and studying the Word and have a vibrant prayer life.*
- *For a life filled with joy in the Holy Spirit.*
- *For their sanctification and maturity - that they would be protected and victorious over sin and temptation.*

### **2. Their Family**

- *For health and protection over their physical, emotional, and spiritual life.*
- *For a strong marriage.*
- *For their children's identity and overall adjustment to a new life.*
- *For their family life to be a model for the locals.*
- *For their family members left here in the US, e.g., aging parents.*

### **3. Their Ministry**

- *For strongholds to be broken, and for peoples' openness to receiving God's love and truth.*
- *For their language acquisition and cultural adaptation.*
- *For their relationships with fellow missionaries and national leaders and workers.*

### **4. Their Country of Service**

- *For favorable government policies, and for any ministry barriers to be removed.*
- *For the locals under religious persecution – that they will find the Truth.*
- *For Christian workers encountering persecution from authorities.*

## **Practical Ways to Pray for Your Missionary**

1. Protection in travel, health, accidents, dangerous situations.
2. Adjusting to the new language, different foods, new customs, difficult climate.
3. Parents' concern for their children's health, schooling, friendships, spiritual growth.
4. Housing accommodations, lack of privacy, differences in living standards, lack of accustomed conveniences.
5. Loneliness, homesickness, lack of accustomed fellowship with others.
6. Interpersonal relationships, dealing with one's own (and others') prejudice, selfishness.
7. Dependence on the faithfulness of others to meet one's financial needs.
8. Effectiveness in ministry, whatever the assignment.
9. Functioning of the tools of ministry. (It is amazing how computers can crash at the wrong time!)
10. Lack of visible results; the "plowing, planting and watering" stages can go on for years!
11. The people being ministered to, the national Christians, the leaders of the country.
12. Need for stability, wisdom, compassion, self-discipline, boldness, power, love, to be filled with the Spirit of God.

From ***Serving as Senders Today*** by Neal Pirolo

*MCT Handbook 2024*

## **Practical Ways to Help Your Missionary**

### **Before They Go**

- Ask them what their needs are (materially and spiritually), and pray earnestly for them.
- Educate yourself about the country they are going to and the people they will be working among so that you can more intelligently pray for them, discuss and understand their plans, and advocate for them.
- Be available for them. Encourage them as their emotions fluctuate or change just before they go.
- Help them find information on needed equipment by reading product reviews, discussing with others, etc.
- Ask them about what they're learning as God takes them down the path that will lead them to a foreign country.
- Help them get all the supplies they'll need to take with them overseas. You can help them by running errands or offering to take care of their children so that they can more easily run errands.
- Mail out their prayer letters.
- Drop dinner off at their house their last few nights so that they can concentrate on accomplishing those last few tasks.
- Offer to have them stay with you if they need a place just before they leave.
- Help them pack the items they'll store here in the U.S., as well as the items they'll take with them or ship. Offer to store things for them.
- Treat them to something special just before they go.
- Take them to the airport as a team and have a send-off there.
- Have an open house for them before they leave so they can pray with and say good-bye to many of their friends.
- Help host the reception for them at PSC after their formal church commissioning.

### **While They're Gone**

- Pray earnestly for them.
- Write to your global partner often without expecting frequent or lengthy responses.
- Keep up to date with what your global partner is doing so that you can encourage them in the work and share their work with the PSC family.
- Remember their birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special days with a card, gift, emails, Skype or telephone call.
- Keep the partner up to date with information on their Missionary Care Team (changes in who's on it, contact info, etc.)

- Pass on any special prayer requests to the missions office (with permission) so that the pastoral staff knows how to pray.
- Send fun "care packages" occasionally to encourage your global partner or to help meet some of their needs.
- Keep your global partner updated with events in the life of PSC. Partners often feel very disconnected to the life of their church back home.
- Consider visiting your global partner on the field.
- Send them a good book you've especially appreciated or a gift certificate for an e-book.
- Mail out their prayer letters for them.
- Help to take care of your global partner's home, vehicle, etc. while they are away.

### **While They're Home**

- Pray earnestly for them.
- Mail out their prayer letters.
- Be at the airport to welcome them home.
- Host a reception at PSC for them so that they can update and celebrate with the body.
- Praise the Lord with them for how God used them overseas.
- Be their small group if they are in Boston regularly and want that fellowship.
- Be available to help them readjust to life in the U.S.
- Have housing ready for them when they arrive home.
- Stock their refrigerator and cupboards so they don't have to shop right away.
- Bring dinner by their house the first few days.
- Help them find a car to borrow while here and provide auto maintenance if needed.
- Give them a special night out or some other special treat.
- Offer to babysit for them.
- Listen to them; be available; show interest in their ministry and overseas life.
- Include them in social activities.
- Offer vacation possibilities.
- Help them to catch up with what is current, what's in and what's out.
- Introduce them to new people at PSC.
- Help them to get caught up on the latest happenings here at PSC.
- Introduce the children to other children their age.
- Give them space as needed.

*Adapted from resources provided by the Bethlehem Baptist Church Global Outreach Department.*

## Resource from Upstream Collective

[theupstreamcollective.org/](http://theupstreamcollective.org/)

### Microskills for Advocates

When you have a struggle in life, who do you go to? Is it a friend? A pastor? An older man or woman? A counselor? When someone in your church has a struggle, what are the structures in place to help them with that struggle? A small group? Pastoral care? A connection with a counselor? Whatever the need, your church likely has a structure in place to help people who are struggling.

But what about your missionaries? Who do they connect with when they have difficulty? Their supervisor and their work friends are also their church, their ministry partner, and essentially their day-to-day family. While they should work to establish friendship with those people and receive counsel from them, this confluence of roles can make being transparent very difficult.

While they can turn to those back home for some of these needs, their family, closest friends, advocates, and sometimes even church staff do not completely understand their situation. Some typical responses to the hard things about life overseas are:

1. To encourage them to tough it out.
2. To try and relate to them.
3. To take their side, assuming that the supervisor, teammate, or national partner is truly as difficult as the missionary says they are.
4. To encourage them to escape the difficulty of overseas life and return home (this is most often the response of family members).

Missionaries often struggle to find the right person(s) to talk with about what's going on in their lives. They are faced day by day with the slow drip of having their routines, habits, and instincts flipped on their heads. Missionaries experience a more-than-average amount of "failure," and what they often need in a confidant, mentor, or a counselor is beyond what the typical advocate is trained to do.

What do we do then, as missions leaders, for these missionaries? Do we need to pay for counseling for missionaries so they have access to this type of resource on a regular basis? Quite possibly. At the very least, the type of person a missionary should go should have some of the skills a counselor would have.

I'd like to think there is a step we can take before that, however. Since our theme for this month is "Advocacy Teams," I want us to consider how we can help our advocates be better equipped to meet the unique needs of our missionaries.

"Microskills" is a term utilized in the counseling profession to describe the competencies for effective communication needed to counsel a person to health. There are many lists of microskills that vary in length and depth. Skills that are found on almost every list that I've seen include:

1. Non-verbals - Making sure that the listeners' non-verbals match the situation, sometimes even matching that of the person they are talking to. Always maintaining appropriate eye contact.
2. Listening more than speaking - Working hard to be slow to speak.
3. Acknowledging what has been said - Repeating back to the counselee what they are saying.
4. Asking open-ended questions - Rather than yes or no questions, asking open-ended questions that cause them to say out loud what has only been said in their mind.
5. Confrontation - At the correct time, with relational money in the bank, challenging their line of thinking to align more closely to their beliefs about what is moral and what is wise.

There are many other “microskills” that counselors use for effective counseling. For our discussion, is it possible for advocates to learn these microskills and put them to use with the missionaries in their care? It is a challenge, no doubt, but we can work towards growing in these microskills and training our advocates to become more proficient in them so they can provide more effective care for our missionaries.

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